





**H**uman resources directors have seen their profile skyrocket over the past year as hybrid working, employee engagement and wellbeing joined the leadership team's top priorities. Now HRDs must again lead the way as they set out what the future of work will look like – and there is no one-size-fits-all model.

At Criticaleye's recent [Human Resources Director Retreat](#), held in association with [Accenture](#) and [Brewin Dolphin](#), business leaders debated the future of the workplace. They explored how the past twelve months have accelerated a new paradigm of how and where we will all work.

**Jamie Wilson**, Managing Director for Group Services at Criticaleye, said traditional structures have been transformed: "Organisations are experimenting and testing new dynamic models for the workplace and these span a complete spectrum.

"At one end, businesses are looking at a full-scale return to the office in a bid to enhance collaboration. At the other, companies are saying they will never return to the office, embracing the opportunity to draw on an extended pool of global talent."

Organisations are searching for a bespoke model that best serves their customers, employees and delivers the business strategy, leaving leaders with multiple factors to weigh up. They may need to adopt more than one approach, particularly in a global organisation.

**Claudine Lewis**, who is SVP of Corporate Human Resources at Kuehne + Nagel, the global logistics business with

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73,000 employees operating across 100 countries, said they have given their leadership teams three areas to consider. "The first dimension is the business imperative – what is required for the business to continue?" she said. "The second is employee feedback and the third is the individual country considerations, including local legislation, culture and infrastructure."

Some businesses have adopted a radical model. **Rebecca Grattan** is Chief People and Culture Officer at global cybersecurity business Avast. "Our overall approach is called 'whole life flexibility'. Everybody in our organisation now has a way of working that means no core hours, no core days and unlimited personal time off. There are absolutely no barriers to when, where and how you work."

## Next Gen Flexible Working

**Rebecca** cautioned that this model won't work for all organisations. "In terms of our implementation method, we decided to go policy light and responsibility heavy. We have not got a million different policies on this because you would tie yourself in knots," she said.

"We told people that if they were confused about the decisions they were making around how flexible they could be then they should ask: 'Is this right for the company? Is this right for the team that I work in? Is this right for me?' If they could answer 'yes' to each of those three questions, then it was probably a great decision, but if they couldn't then they needed to talk to somebody, such as their line manager or HR."

Remote onboarding can even have some advantages. "We have put some things in place which we won't go back on," **Rebecca** said. "We run global onboarding digitally over Zoom now. The CEO, one of our founders and I carry out global onboarding every month, which we would never have been able to do physically."

The induction process has been adapted at Kuehne + Nagel too. "We're proud of our culture and we want to protect that," **Claudine** said. "We are ensuring that every new person that comes into the business understands that culture and feels a sense of belonging. The communication plan we have rolled out includes a welcome@KN app that is sent to new joiners 30 days before they arrive. This app drip feeds information and builds on the strong induction programme we have." >



**Chris Jones**, UKI HR Strategy & Consulting Lead at Accenture, has seen the benefits of new starter inductions using virtual and augmented reality. “We onboard all new joiners into Accenture through a new immersive VR / AR approach, combining this with specific learning challenges over the first 30 days which really target and accelerate the necessary skills and behaviours to navigate the company, build networks of support and understand the culture and values.

“We found the group that went through the VR / AR onboarding were more productive in the first 60 days than a control group that underwent physical onboarding, so I think digital has a massive role to play in improving productivity.”

## Rise of the HR Detective

Today’s hybrid models are also providing organisations with more data than ever before. “Everything’s been digitised, but we also have more complexity in the ways the workforce interacts. The big opportunity is leveraging the data and the tools that are available to really optimise how we work together,” **Chris** said.

He believes the concept of organisational network analysis – a way of examining the communication and socio-technical networks in a business – may finally have its day in the sun. “There is a passive way of carrying this out with surveys, but also a more intelligent way by using all the different data sources available like emails, calendars, collaboration tools, meetings, processes and your core employee data,” he explained.

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“If we use this to understand who the really influential people are and then target learning and change programmes via those influencers, who aren’t always the managers or leaders, then that will be a valuable opportunity.”

This approach isn’t only about efficiency and productivity, but also about taking a temperature check of the mood and health of your organisation.

“Understanding how people interact with each other and how work gets done in the hybrid model is leading to new roles, such as the HR data detective,” **Chris** said. “These people would have the skills and capability to synthesise data and understand how the workforce is operating, for example from a wellness and diversity & inclusion perspective.”

Whatever model each organisation finally picks, it will require new and better skills from its leaders. Communication will be crucial when managing both remote and

office-based workers, as will the ability to build a cohesive team.

**Chris** cautioned that this cannot be taken for granted: “Most managers and leaders weren’t equipped to deal with this new way of working and have had to adapt – we’ll see them continue to hone that as the new hybrid models get established.” ■

You can view Criticleye’s Human Resources Director Research 2021 results [here](#).

### Key findings include:

**90%** of HRDs agree that mentoring improves the performance of senior executives

**83%** of HRDs say management teams are too inward-looking

**60%** of HRDs want more focus on leadership development

For more information on Criticleye’s Human Resources Director Retreat, taking place in February 2022, please click [here](#).

### Featuring Commentary From:



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